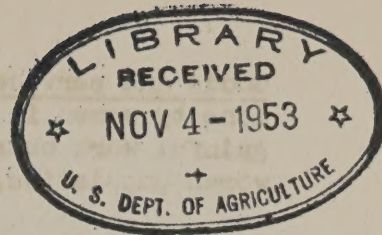


THE EFFECT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRENDS
ON HOME FURNISHINGS PROGRAMS*

by

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Reviewing economic and social trends affecting home furnishings programs has been an inspiring experience. If trends that are today affecting home furnishings programs continue, there is far more optimism in the overall picture than pessimism. To be able to present an optimistic point of view is a real satisfaction to a speaker. This does not mean easy going on all fronts, however, because some social changes will "try our souls," not only regarding what we teach but how we teach.

Three purposes have been kept in mind in assembling this material for you:

- (1) To review pertinent nationwide changes for trends.
- (2) To provide you with significant data in condensed form for ready reference.
- (3) To provide a few stimulating ideas for discussion to aid in charting future home furnishings extension work.

You are well aware of general trends, both social and economic. They are reviewed briefly to provide us with a similar background upon which to take a look forward as to the effect of these trends on home furnishings programs.

Households increase -- The number of households in the United States in 1950 was about 12 times what it had been in 1850, whereas the population was 6 times what it had been in 1850. This trend may continue. See page 2, Rural Family Living Charts, 1953, for further implications on needs for home furnishings and economic use of housewife's time. 1/

More children -- Between 1940 and 1950, there was a 55 percent increase in number of children under 5 years of age and a 24 percent increase in the number aged 5 to 9 years. 2/

Such changes make it imperative for parents to choose furniture and furnishings that will be suitable to the needs of growing children as well as adults. 3/

Older people -- There was an increase of 33 percent in population between 1940 and 1950 in the 65 to 74 year group and 45 percent in the 75 year and older group. Planning homes and furnishings for the "golden age" became an important phase of future programs, especially in safety factors, since most fatal accidents in the home occur in this age group.

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Goods and services produced outside the home -- "The amount of work done by women in the home was decreased steadily and the amount of their gainful work outside has increased, usually with greater rapidity than woman population." 4/

This shift from household to factory production will probably continue. In the home furnishings field, studies showed that 28 percent of rural women and 6 percent of urban women made curtains. 5/ This same trend is evident in food, such as packaged mixes, frozen prepared foods, frozen vegetables, and fruits.

More self labor -- A counter trend that shows up in advertising of paint unfinished furniture, and many other items is the "do it yourself" trend. It is based on saving money, use of leisure time, and the resultant sense of achievement. Production statistics on unfinished furniture bear out this trend.

Mobility -- Mobility of families and changes in home furnishings needed are illustrated by data available from the Trailer Coach Manufacturer's Association. 6/

USE GROUPS	Percentage by purpose for which purchased (based on total sales by the industry)	
	1937	1950
	Percent	Percent
Temporary housing.....	Less than 1	45
Mobile occupation.....	15.....	35
Retired individuals.....	35.....	15
Trailer life by preference..	Less than 1	4
Vacationers.....	50.....	1

Casual Living -- The trend toward what may be called "casual living" is not easy to prove through research data, but it shows up everywhere as one visits with friends and is invited to the kitchen to help prepare and serve food since help is no longer available. It shows up in men's and women's dress -- tending toward the lightweight, informal, gay, comfortable and convenient. 7/ It shows up in housing, in "bringing the outside inside," through workrooms on the first floor, ranch-type houses, bigger windows, simpler furniture, more plants in the home, and in a thousand other ways. It is a trend that will greatly affect home furnishings programs.

Studies of farm families' needs and preferences, however, show that they are reluctant to give up certain established family values or ways of doing housework. Ninety percent of families in all regions do all or most of their laundry at home, and in certain regions, families want separate dining rooms. 8/

Family use of farm homes -- A study on family use of farm homes in Michigan shows that the bulk of daytime farm family living occurred in kitchen, living and dining rooms and that leisure time activities of all family members should be taken into consideration in today's house planning. It was suggested that dining rooms should be considered as an activity room because of the many diverse uses given to this room and furniture and furnishings selected according to its uses. When central heat is available in Michigan farm houses, the uses of rooms especially bedrooms now unheated would probably be different. 2/

Consumer Price Index (Index of change in prices of goods and services purchased by city wage earners and clerical worker families to maintain their level of living). -- Since the Consumer Price Index covers prices for goods and services and indicates the relative importance of the items the family buys, it is worth reviewing to see what percentage of all items is spent for housing and other items that make up housing:

Relative importance of all items:

	<u>Percent</u>
Food	30
Housing	32
Apparel	10
Transportation	11
Medical care	5
Personal	2
Reading and recreation	5
Other goods and services (including tobacco and alcohol)	5
All items	<u>100</u>

The breakdown for housing, which has a 32 percent importance, is assigned as follows:

	<u>Percent</u>
Rent	5
Other shelter	12
Home purchase	
Repairs and maintenance	
Other homeowner costs	
Gas and electricity	2
Solid fuels and fuel oil	1
House furnishings	7
Household textiles	
Floor coverings	
Furniture and bedding	
Equipment and appliances	
Other housewares	
Household operation	5
Soaps and detergents	
Household services	
Total housing	32

This conference is concerned with helping families make satisfying decisions primarily in relation to the item to which families assign the relative importance of 7 out of 100, or 7 cents out of \$1, if we use money figures. We must not lose sight of the decisions that families must make in other categories of total housing and the relation of housing items to all items. 10/

Income and house furnishings expenditures -- In 1950 the median family income was \$3,300, over one-quarter greater than in 1945. 11/ If 7 cents of every dollar was spent for home furnishings this would mean \$231 to be divided among household textiles, floor coverings, furniture, equipment, and other housewares.

Earlier marriages -- In 1940 only 22 percent of our girls at ages 18 and 19 years were married. By 1951, this had gone up to 32 percent. At ages 20 to 24, the rise was from 51 to 67 percent, and at ages 25 to 29 from 74 to 86 percent. 11/ Other data in 1953 Rural Family Living Chart Book show that the age of husband at birth of last child had lowered from 36 years of age to 30 years between 1890 and 1951. Establishing homes and buying the needed furnishings require decision making of vast importance. Just how are extension programs for 4-H boys and girls and young men and women helping them? This may be one of the most important questions for us to ask ourselves.

Recently, when reading the New York Plan of Work, I found that the New York Extension staff had made a study of 4-H home furnishings club work, interviewing 100 girls from grades 5 through 10 in urban and rural areas. They found greatest interest, as one might expect, in late teens and among girls who plan to marry. As a result of the study they are holding evening meetings with members, parents, and leaders, in which they are emphasizing a longtime project in room improvement, teaching basic art principles, and organizing teaching materials so the 4-H Club member may work by herself.

A good source of ideas on 4-H Club work is the circular entitled, "A Look at 4-H Club Work in Home Improvement, A Report of 4-H Club Home Improvement Conference, Chicago, Ill., March 1952." Pages 8 to 11 give many helpful ideas on situation objectives and plans of action.

The 4-H Home Improvement Guide for Local Leaders, which will be available in fall of 1953, will be another excellent source of ideas for strengthening 4-H Club work and extension work with young men and women.

Differences in standards and levels of living -- Differences between city and farm families have been gradually disappearing when judged according to the possession of electricity, radios, running water, automobile and refrigeration.

84 percent of rural farms in USA now have electricity.

83 percent of all homes in USA and 42 percent of rural farm homes have running water inside house.

75 percent of all homes and 28 percent of rural farm homes have flush toilets.

61 percent of rural farms have refrigeration.
93 percent of rural farm homes, 93 percent of rural nonfarm homes,
and 97 percent of urban homes have radios.
63% of rural farms have automobiles 2/

Education -- In 1950 the formal school level of rural-farm people (adults 25 years and older) was 1 year higher than in 1940, but the rural non-farm school level was 2 years higher.

Research in human behavior and relationships has brought about the greatest change in extension methods of working with people and given untold assistance in clarification of human behavior and relationship elements in home furnishings. Such studies as that by Cornell University on The Cornell Kitchen, Product Design Through Research contains a chapter on sociopsychological aspects of kitchen design. The topics discussed in this chapter give one a look ahead on what the future holds in store for the extension home furnishings specialist as she helps families relate "physical factors on the one hand and sociopsychological on the other" to home furnishings.

Sociopsychological (Value patterns of homemakers toward kitchen design;
aspects of kitchen (emphasis on family-centered living; emphasis on social
design (standing; emphasis on physical convenience; emphasis
(on aesthetics; personal psychological reactions of
(the homemaker; motivation-energy relationships; physi-
(cal-emotional relationships; intra-familial relations
(of the homemaker; extra-familial relations of the
(homemaker; physical factors exerting psychological
(influence on kitchen design. 15/

Interests of women at different economic levels -- Regardless of economic level (prosperous, comfortable, getting by, or poor) the top 4 out of 11 reading interests of rural women, were fiction, food, style and beauty, and house decoration, in that order, except for the prosperous group, which ranked fiction and current events first, home decoration second, style and beauty third, and food fourth. 14/

Magazine reading -- The percentage of farm and rural nonfarm women reading four women's service magazines were compared in a study in 1946. Farm women were doing less reading of all four magazines than were non-farm women or all women. The greatest percentage difference was 7 percent less farm women reached than rural nonfarm women on reading a typical issue of one magazine. The fact that the differences were no greater means that what reaches the city women or rural nonfarm and farm women is about the same. 14/

Mass media -- Television, our newest mass medium, has developed before our very eyes. The changes that it will make in the way we help people add to their fund of useful home furnishing knowledge as a tool to more satisfying living will be affected by it. Half of the families in the United States have television sets. They are still mostly urban-centered.

Twenty-eight States are carrying on extension television programs. Radios are in the great majority of homes. 14/

Newspapers -- Approximately 4 families out of 5 subscribe to a daily paper and to 1 or more agricultural papers. There are 9,000 weekly newspapers in the United States. Weekly newspapers have an average circulation of close to 3,000 families. If a story is used in one paper it has reached 3,000 families, not persons. 14/

We are devoting a session later in the week to the discussion of mass media. Other pertinent changes will no doubt be called to our attention at that time.

Technological changes -- Plastics, paper, glass, and rubber, to mention only a few materials, have made great changes in home furnishings. These changes have been so gradual that the resultant less laborious house cleaning is often overlooked.

The old coal heater that had to be put up every fall and taken down in the spring made spring and fall housekeeping upheavals necessary. Many farm homes are still without central heat and few have sidewalks around the house.

Families cannot consider purchasing light-colored rugs and furniture except those made of easily cleaned materials. The talks and tours this week will bring us up to date on the trends in materials and technological changes and their effect on home furnishings. In general the trend is toward easily cleaned, comfortable, simple, attractive products.

Buying practices -- A Michigan study shows that 60 percent of large expenditures including furniture were planned expenditures. Durability was the outstanding value wanted in furniture. Label information for furniture was remembered by 65 percent of the families, while 90 percent remembered label information for equipment. Twenty-two percent of the choices in large expenditures (furniture, clothing, and equipment) would not be repeated. Thirty percent of the furniture was bought on the installment plan. How can home furnishings programs help people become aware of installment changes? Should buying by installment be left to home management specialists and others to teach? Can home furnishings specialists help cut down on the high percentage of dissatisfaction shown in this study?

Conclusions as stated by Calla Van Syckle, the author, regarding responsibilities of educational agencies are worth repeating:

"Improvement in the kind and extent of information on quality made available by producers, particularly information about performance in use, would help insure a larger percentage of satisfactory purchases. Sales clerks better trained to provide useful information about the goods they sell and reliable information on quality provided by such widespread sources as newspaper, radio, and magazine

advertising would also be of great help. Educational agencies have a responsibility to teach consumers to know where and how to get reliable information about what to look for in order to get the values wanted. Also, perhaps they should promote the practice of consumers clearly seeing a 'large expenditure' purchase in relation to later as well as present needs, the setting in which it is to be used, and the total family budget. 12/

Other data on buymanship of interest to us concern the relation of age to the amount of buying. The 10 to 17 year age group were less than 1 percent of the buyers, though they made up 19 percent of the population when this study was made. The 18 to 29 year age group did 15 percent of the buying and were 26 percent of the population, while the 30 to 49 year age group did 64 percent of the buying and were 34 percent of the population. The older age group from 50 to 65 and over, did 22 percent of the buying and were 21 percent of population. 14/

Effect of economic changes -- Families--city, rural nonfarm, and rural farm alike--have made unusual progress in the last two decades in improving their houses and the facilities and furnishings in them.

What may happen to family income and thus affect continued improvement in housing and furnishings is dependent on the outside forces that will affect the Nation and the world as a whole. If peace came, that would allow the nation to turn some of the money now being spent for weapons of war into new homes, food and clothing, and other necessities of life. 13/

The studies that seem to raise the most important questions in regard to economics are those of Michigan and the housing needs and preferences studies by USDA and the experiment stations. Helping people make satisfying decisions, whether it is refinishing a piece of furniture, making or choosing a lamp shade, or deciding on all the furnishings needed to start housekeeping, is not the most important consideration. Our unique contribution on the economic side is, in some way or other, to help the family to relate this purchase or choice to their whole budget and the values or goals both human and physical for which they are striving.

It has not seemed necessary in reviewing economic changes to clarify what kind and how much furniture and furnishings would be on the market from which consumers might choose, or the prices of such furnishings. You are well aware of what industry has to offer and prices. Yearly the Agriculture and Rural Family Living Outlook will provide you with economic information upon which to base adjustments and changes.

Occasionally someone raises the question why extension workers bring ideas to people that make them discontented with their present houses and equipment. Why not leave people content with what they have? From the point of view of economics, purchasing by farmers of the products of industry is important. Farmers under our industrial society will have to buy new and better furniture, and furnishings, have water installed, and

use the other output of manufacturers if farmers expect city families to continue to improve their diets and purchase more and better food from the farmer. Farm Families' "consumption" plans are as important today as are their production plans. In studies on ways to increase the use of electricity on farms it has been found that 80 to 90 percent of all electricity consumed was used in the home. 1/

- A real challenge, however, is to help the less well educated, and families having lower income, to achieve the highest level of housing, furnishing, and equipment possible with what they have. Certain practices such as household carpentry, painting, wallpapering, and refinishing furniture should continue to be an important part of extension programs.

Effect of social change -- It is social change that will have the most effect upon us in future years. It will change our teaching methods as it already has with television. It will require us to question the large percentage of meetings that we hold with women alone. We will hunt and find ways to reach husbands and wives together. It will mean that it is as much concern of ours as of any other specialists to devise ways to help families clarify their goals and values and to consider the house or home as a whole and not furniture and furnishings alone. Management, the tool or process to help us "get what we want with what we have," will become a part of home furnishing programs. It will mean working more closely than ever before with family life, home management, agricultural engineering, and agricultural economics specialists, to mention a few. It means that we will want to take advanced courses and become well acquainted with our resident and research staffs and others who will broaden our vision and understanding of human relations as well as home furnishings.

As I assembled the information in this paper, I became keenly aware of the contribution research has played, as it always does, to any dynamic extension program. Programs will continue to be based on research findings, and in return we must carry back to research staffs further needs and an appreciation for what has already been done.

The two-way flow of information is especially pertinent between research and extension workers; and, on the other hand, between extension staff and retailers and manufacturers, as this conference plan clearly demonstrates.

Your annual reports show that you yourselves are establishing result demonstrations in growing numbers, in your own offices and in your homes, and they also show that you are helping agents to do likewise. As more county agricultural extension buildings are built or offices in courthouses are planned to fit the needs of county home demonstration agents, a motto well worth remembering is that "one picture is equal to a thousand words."

A concluding paragraph is always hard to write. As I reread this paper, I realized that up to this point, the "atomic age" had not been mentioned. The use of atomic energy for destruction is well known to us. Scientists

tell us that the use of atomic energy to improve living is also on our door steps. It can be used to heat and light homes, and to produce cheaper electricity. It will provide jobs for many people and open large areas of land for production thus giving people income with which to improve homes. Certainly the future for the improvement of homes, furnishings and facilities in this atomic age is hopeful if we can solve our human relationship problems with our world neighbors.

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- 6/ Housing Research, Spring 1952. Housing and Home Finance Agency, Washington, D. C.
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- 15/ The Cornell Kitchen, Product Design through Research edited by Glenn H. Beyer assisted by Frank Weise, Cornell University Housing Research Center, Ithaca, N. Y.

Discussion:

Q. With marrying age young - should not 4-H projects be better?

Ans. Certainly yes. Buymanship habits are developed quite young. Young married groups should be organized through county Extension workers.

Other recommended reading - Journal of Home Economics, Oct. 1952, pp 616, Dr. Hazel Kirk's article on "Economic Responsibilities of Families -- Increasing or Diminishing?"

For more information on Trailer Camps read "Don't call them trailer trash", Saturday Evening Post, Aug. 1952.